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Storm theory for the 'UFO'

Paul Bennett

AN AUSTRALIAN family's experience with what they claimed was an unidentified flying object might be an unusual natural phenomenon — a dry thunderstorm — according to scientists.

Faye Knowles and her three sons aged 18 to 24 said they were stalked by a UFO which lifted their car off the road and spun it around before dropping it back with a flattened tyre.

Professor Peter Schwerdtfergger, head of meteorology at Flinders University in Adelaide, said the details provided by the Knowles family were consistent with a dry thunderstorm.

In such an event, the atmosphere becomes highly charged with an electric field which could have strange effects, Professor Schwerdtfergger told reporters.

The fine ash covering the car could be a product of lightning and the violent shaking of the vehicle a result of the storm, he said.

"No doubt if you are in the middle of a fairly intense electric field, you're going to feel very strange," he said. Professor Schwerdtfergger added that many bushfires in Australia were the result of the natural phenomena.

Egg-cup

Mrs Knowles and her boys were travelling the 1,500 miles from Perth to Melbourne to see her ageing mother but said they were too terrified to repeat the journey home.

Mike Manton, head of the Bureau of Meteorology's research centre in Melbourne, said there had been many reports of dry thunderstorms but the bureau said there was no thunderstorm activity in the area at the time.

The family said a huge eggcup-shaped object chased them for more than 90 minutes along a remote highway before leaping on top of their car and clinging to its roof with suction cups.

After trying to evade the creature or craft at high speed, the Knowles said they stopped the car and hid in bushes — only to be pursued by it 15 minutes later.

Police said at least people aboard three fishing boats and a couple holidaying in Melbourne also reported seeing a similar UFO, and investigations were continuing.